

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, BR
SUBJ: UNIVERSITY OF SAO PAULO STUDENTS DEMONSTRATE AGAINST
UNIVERSITY BUDGET CUTS

REF: BRASILIA 2852

1. SUMMARY. ON MARCH 30, ABOUT 3,000 UNIVERSITY OF SAO PAULO (USP) STUDENTS WERE THWARTED BY NERVOUS POLICE AUTHORITIES FROM STAGING A DOWNTOWN DEMONSTRATION, PRIMARILY AGAINST USP BUDGET CUTS, AND THEN FINALLY PERMITTED TO VOICE THEIR PROTESTS UNIMPEDED IN A MARCH TO A SUBURBAN COMMERCIAL CENTER NEAR THE CAMPUS. IT WAS THE FIRST OFF-CAMPUS STUDENT DEMONSTRATION IN TWO YEARS. TO PREVENT THE GATHERING, SAO PAULO STATE SECURITY SECRETARY COL. ERASMO DIAS THREW UP ROADBLOCKS TO STOP TRAFFIC FROM REACHING THE DOWNTOWN AREA, CAUSING THE WORST TRAFFIC JAM IN THE HISTORY OF THE CITY. THE NEXT DAY, THE IMMEDIATE TENSIONS WERE DISSIPATED DURING A MEETING BETWEEN STUDENTS AND THE GOVERNOR. THE POST-MORTEM ON DIAS' ACTIONS FOUND HIM OVERREACTING, POSSIBLY BECAUSE OF THE DICEY NATIONAL SITUATION (REFTEL). BUT, AS ONE COMMENTATOR WRYLY NOTED, THE COST TO THE CITY OF DIAS' ACTIONS WAS SEVERAL TIMES OVER THE AMOUNT THAT HAD BEEN CUT FROM THE UNIVERSITY BUDGET. END SUMMARY.

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2. THE STUDENT PROTESTS OVER USP BUDGET CUTS WERE ORGANIZED BY THE "FREE CENTRAL STUDENT DIRECTORATE" (DCE-LIVRE), A UNIVERSITY-WIDE STUDENT GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION WHOSE EXISTENCE IS NOT OFFICAILLY RECOGNIZED BY UNIVERSITY AUTHORITIES. ORIGINALLY, THE STUDENTS HAD INTENDED TO HOLD THEIR DEMONSTRATION IN A DOWNTOWN PLAZA IN

FRONT OF THE OFFICES OF THE SECRETARIAT OF EDUCATION, A PURELY SYMBOLIC GESTURE SINCE THE BUDGET IS CONTROLLED BY THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE THROUGH THE PLANNING SECRETARIAT. HOWEVER, THE HARDLINE STATE SECURITY SECRETARY, COL. ERASMO DIAS, VETOED THEIR PLAN AS "AN ATTEMPT TO DEFY AND TEST THE AUTHORITIES." TO ENFORCE HIS BAN, HE MOUNTED AN EXTENSIVE SYSTEM OF ROADBLOCKS AND CAR SEARCHES WHICH NOT ONLY KEPT MOST OF THE WOULD BE STUDENT PROTESTERS AWAY, BUT ALSO STRNDED TENS OF THOUSANDS OF WORKERS FOR HOURS IN THE WORST TRAFFIC JAM IN THE HISTORY OF THE CITY. THIRTEEN STUDENTS WHO SOMEHOW MANAGED TO ELUDE THE POLICE AND REACH THE DEMONSTRATION SITE WERE TAKEN IN FOR QUESTIONING BUT LATER RELEASED. THERE WERE NO STUDENT-POLICE CLASHES, HOWEVER.

3. ALTHOUGH THWARTED FROM REACHING THEIR PRIMARY OBJECTIVE, THE STUDENTS WERE PERMITTED TO MARCH WITHOUT INTERFERENCE TO A SUBURBAN COMMERCIAL CENTER NEARER CAMPUS. THERE, DURING A TWENTY MINUTE RALLY, THEY CHANTED THEIR DEMANDS, PRINCIPALLY FOR A RESTORATION OF THE CUTS IN THE USP BUDGET BUT ALSO FOR HIGHER SALARIES FOR WORKERS AND A RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC LIBERTIES. STUDENTS FROM CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY JOINED IN THE DEMONSTRATION.

4. ON THE FOLLOWING DAY, MARCH 31, STUDENTS BELATEDLY TOOK UP AN EARLIER OFFER BY GOVERNOR PAULO EGYDIO MARTINS TO DISCUSS THEIR GRIEVANCES PERSONALLY. WHILE THE TALKS WERE INCONCLUSIVE, THEY DID REDUCE TENSIONS SOMEWHAT. THEY ALSO GAVE THE GOVERNOR A PLATFORM FROM WHICH TO RENEW HIS CRITICISM OF THE USP ADMINISTRATORS FOR ALLEGED MISMANAGEMENT AND MISALLOCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY BUDGET DURING A FINANCIALLY DIFFICULT PERIOD FOR THE STATE. (LATER THE GOVERNOR REPORTEDLY PROMISED TO SUPPLEMENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE USP BUDGET FOR THE SECOND SEMESTER.)

5. COMMENT: COL. ERASMO'S RESORT TO THE EXTREMEM EASURE OF VIRTUALLY CLOSING DOWN THE CENTER AND SOUTHERN HALF OF THE CITY MERELY TO HEAD OFF A DOWNTWON STUDENT RALLY -- A TACTIC USED IN JANUARY 1976 TO LIMIT THE NUMBER OF PROTESTERS ATTENDING A MASS FOR METAL WORKER MANOEL FIEL FILHO WHO DIED WHILE IN CUSTODY OF THE II ARMY DOI -- HAS DRAWN CONSIDERABLE CENSURE. ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, EVEN THE GOVERNOR HIMSELF IMPLICITLY REGISTERED DIS-APPROVAL BY DENYING ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS SECURITY SECRETARY'S DECISION.

6. COL. ERASMO'S OVER-REACTION MAY HAVE BEEN TRIGGERED IN PART BY NERVOUSNESS OVER THE INFELICITOUS COINCIDENCE OF TWO OTHER DISTURBING BUT UNRELATED EVENTS -- THE PRESIDENT'S DISPUTE WITH THE MDB OVER THE JUDICIARY REFORM BILL (REFTEL) AND THE MARCH 29 TRASHING OF A SUBURBAN SAO PAULO TRAIN STATION BY WORKERS IN INCENSED BY INTERMINABLE DELAYS AND OVERCROWDING. ERASMO MAY HAVE FEARED THAT HAD THE STUDENTS BEEN ALLOWED DOWNTOWN, A POTENTIALLY

EXPLOSIVE SITUATION MIGHT HAVE BEEN CREATED BECAUSE OF THE ALMOST

CERTAINTY THAT THE STUDENTS WOULD HAVE TRIED TO EXTEND
THEIR PROTEST TO OTHER MORE SENSITIVE ISSUES. AT THE
VERY LEAST, COL. ERASMO WANTED TO STAGE A SHOW OF FORCE TO
INTIMIDATE THE STUDENTS, BUT IN A WAY THAT WOULD NOT LEAD TO
COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE POLICE-STUDENT VIOLENCE.

7. WHILE THE STUDENTS EVIDENTLY DID WISH TO EXPAND THEIR PROTEST
BY WIDENING THE ISSUES AND DRAWING UPON OUTSIDE STUDENT SUPPORT, IT
APPEARS FOR THE MOMENT THAT THE UPCOMING EASTERHOLIDAYS WILL HAVE
A DAMPENING EFFECT ON THEIR EFFORTS. IT IS WORTH POINTING OUT,
HOWEVER, THAT THEIR RALLY, EVEN THOUGH DEFLECTED FROM ITS ORIGINAL
GOAL, WAS THE FIRST EXCLUSIVELY STUDENT PROTEST TOLERATED
OFF-CAMPUS IN A LEAST TWO YEARS.

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